



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE RELIGIO-HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.<sup>1</sup>

THE thesis which it is sought to demonstrate in the succeeding pages is this: That the religion of the New Testament, in important, and even in some vital, points can be interpreted only in the light of the influence of extraneous religions, and that this influence reached the men of the New Testament by way of Judaism.

What is the attitude of present-day scholarship toward the question we are discussing and toward the thesis we have set up? It has long been maintained by many scholars that certain elements in the New Testament are of foreign origin, and this is now almost universally conceded. In particular, the Logos doctrine of the Johanne Gospel has over and over again been derived from Philo, and through Philo from Greek philosophy. For some time now especial emphasis has been laid upon Greek influence, particularly, for instance, in the writings of Holtzmann. In addition to the Alexandrian philosophy, the Greek Mysteries and Gnosticism have been considered in this connection. On the other hand, much less attention has been paid to the tracing of elements of the New Testament to Oriental sources. We may cite a characteristic instance of this from Holtzmann,<sup>2</sup> who mentions in his study of the Apocalypse of John and the foreign elements which have of late been sought in it, the doctrine of the twelve ages of the world, which he cites as existing among Hindus, Persians, Greeks, and Jews. But he conceives of the path which this doctrine took as follows: From

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the author's MS. by W. H. Carruth of the Univ. of Kansas.

<sup>2</sup> *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, I., p. 476.

the Hindus and the Persians it came to the Greeks, from the Greeks, under the influence of Pythagoreanism, to the Jews. It is to be noted that he quite ignores in this theory the whole Orient which lies between India and Persia proper on the one side and the peoples of the West on the other. This entire populous empire, which had been dominated from early times by the mighty Babylonian civilisation, is overlooked by him. He does not even raise the question, whether this doctrine may not have come to the Jews directly from the Orient. And yet it is possible, in this particular case, to say with tolerable certainty how this doctrine reached the Jews.

The doctrine of the twelve ages of the world, according to which the entire course of history represents a year with its twelve months, is of Babylonian origin. Babylonia is the natural home of such systems of chronology, which were originally connected with astrology. From Babylonia these chronologies spread over the whole world, to India on the east, to the Greeks and Jews on the west. But the Babylonian origin of this chronology is by no means a new discovery: it might have been noted long ago, for it is at the bottom of the system of Berosus. It is, however, a characteristic fact, that such a learned and cautious scholar as Holtzmann should have put such a wrong interpretation upon this obvious example of the influence of Babylonian civilisation on Judaism. Wernle too, in his brilliant book on *The Beginnings of our Religion*, has frequently pointed out Greek influence, but almost no Oriental influence whatever. I believe that I make no mistake in saying that a young scholar who prepares himself to-day for independent scientific investigation in the New Testament will post up on things Greek, but he will scarcely get the notion that it is necessary to be posted in the languages and history of the Orient in order to interpret the New Testament. Exception must be made of earlier and present attempts to get light from Hindu sources, which are full of difficulties from the mere circumstances of the immense geographical distance between India and Palestine, where again the existence of Babylon is ignored.

Quite recently Bousset has begun to call attention to parallels

from the Persian religion. The present writer has attempted to demonstrate the existence of certain Babylonian elements in the Apocalypse of John. It may be said that in recent years the interest in such undertakings is greatly on the increase, and yet Wernle is certainly right in saying (p. 21) that these questions have scarcely been formulated at the present day, certainly not yet answered.

#### REASONS FOR THE NEGLECT OF THE ORIENT IN NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

How does it come that the religio-historical questions in the New Testament have been comparatively so little studied, and that the Orient in particular has been so little regarded in this connection? It is worth while to raise this question, not for the sake of reproaching anyone, but in order that it may be recognised that this condition has a natural reason in the development of the history of the science.

We might cite a large number of reasons. An earlier view, which prevailed for decades and has a classic representative in the *Biblische Theologie* of B. Weiss, regarded it as the proper, and indeed almost the sole, function of Biblical theology to reproduce with fidelity the utterances of the Biblical authors. This view still prevails in a large proportion of the commentaries on the New Testament. The watchword is not the interpretation, not the establishment of the historical place of a book, but only faithful reproduction.

It must be conceded that the effort has been to fulfil this task with admirable conscientiousness and a logical precision that is often astounding. But we can add, without being unjust to our predecessors, that precise reproduction and logical interpretation must be only the preparation for the real, vital, historical understanding. Yet even when the investigators—as has been done frequently for a long time past—went further and aimed at a religio-historical understanding, it was natural that the eyes of the searchers lingered longer in the sphere of Greek culture than in the Orient. For the New Testament is really a Greek book.

One who, like the author of this treatise, comes fresh from the Old Testament and considers the New Testament, is deeply impressed with the strength of the Greek influence in the New Testament. We find there, for instance, a delicacy in the use of particles, as for instance at the opening of the first epistle of Peter, “κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός, ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοήν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ) which would have been absolutely impossible to a Palestinian Jew. And there is no doubt that this strongly Hellenistic impress in the form must be accompanied by Hellenisation in the contents.

It is not the intention in the following pages to speak of these Greek influences in the New Testament, not, however, because they are to be denied, but because the author, whose special studies deal with the Orient, would have nothing particular to offer on the subject.

Another reason for the fact that scholars have hitherto been onesided in the interest for the Greek elements involved, is that our classical education has brought Hellenism nearer to us than the Orient is. Furthermore, the specialisation of our scholarship has made it difficult for the New Testament student to obtain any acquaintance whatever with the Orient. In these days we hear from all sides the complaint that specialisation, to which on the one hand we owe such admirable results, is on the other hand a constant limitation on our fields of study. And for this reason, to help so far as in me lies to bridge the gap which separates the various branches of theological study, I undertake the treatment of the present subject. I beg the reader to consider the following investigations as a sample of the view of the New Testament obtained by an Old Testament student who gazes across the border.

The principal cause, however, that has prevented the Orient from receiving due attention in New Testament studies hitherto, is that the knowledge of the contemporary Orient, that is, of the intellectual development of the Orient in the time of the Persian and Greek dominion, is in large measure buried under the

ruins of that day. "We possess," says Ed. Meyer, "authentic contemporary records for none of the religions involved, except Judaism." "Between the older form of the Egyptian, the Babylonian, and Persian religions, and that which confronts us (chiefly in foreign garb) in Greek and Christian times, there yawns a broad gulf, which cannot be filled by native records." "From Babylon we have scarcely any religious texts whatever of the time following Nebuchadnezzar (from Persian times we have only Babylonian annals, copies of old texts, astronomical observations and chronologies, and contracts), so that it is impossible to say in this case to what extent religion may have changed and developed." As is known, Phœnician and Aramaic literature is almost wholly lost to us. The Persian, according to Ed. Meyer, who is here following Darmsteter, does not appear in documents until much later; though it is well known that the majority of authorities on Persian literature hold a different opinion: Tiele places the earliest portions of the Younger Avesta at about 800 B. C., the Gathas (the most ancient songs) several centuries earlier.<sup>1</sup> Those references to foreign religions which we find later in Greek, are not easily accessible to those who are not adepts in this epoch. A new world is arising before us at present out of the Egyptian papyri, but the history of later Egyptian civilisation has not yet been written. Ed. Meyer, in the third volume of his *Geschichte des Altertums*, has attempted to outline for us the status of the religions in the Persian Empire, but unfortunately his history has not yet reached the latest period. Even Hebrew archæology is wont to close with the Old Testament; we have as yet no history of the Jewish civilisation down to the time of Jesus, despite the fact that we have ample sources. Schürer has compiled very valuable data especially concerning Hellenic influence in Jewish territory.

And thus is to be explained the fact that investigators in the field of the New Testament have frequently failed altogether to take account of the Orient, for the Orient seems to be out of the current of modern investigation. Clearly enough, it is the pre-

---

<sup>1</sup> Tiele, *Geschichte der Religion*, II., p. 49.

dominance of Hellenism, and later of the Christian Church, which has thus buried out of sight the knowledge of the later Orient. But that this Orient was still alive in that period and capable of new experiences is shown by the rise of new religions which originated at the great religious solstice and in the centuries before and after: Gnosticism, which in the opinion of many recent scholars rose originally in the Orient and then flowed through the channel of Judaism into the Christian Church; Manichæism, Mandæism, Islam. But, not least of all, the vigor of the Orient is to be recognised in the fact that at this very time some of the ancient religions came again to the front,—the Egyptian, Parsi, Syrian religions and those of Asia Minor, which afterwards made their way, carried by the legions, into the Roman Empire and even to the borders of Germany and Britain. And finally this vitality is manifest in the mighty influence which the Orient exercised upon Judaism, and then, as we are about to show in what follows, upon nascent Christianity.

Furthermore, we must consider that the knowledge of the Orient is rendered extraordinarily difficult for one who is not a specialist in the field by the great number of languages involved. And thus it comes that we are obliged to draw our knowledge of the Orient in Persian and Hellenistic times in the main from footnotes and inferences. At any rate, it becomes possible to comprehend why the learning of the Orient, so imperfectly known, has thus far done so little to enrich other scientific fields.

#### DANGERS OF RESEARCH IN THIS FIELD.

Finally the writer would like to consider certain warnings against the dangers of research into the field of the history of religion, and this particularly because the warnings have been uttered by two such eminent and respected men as Harnack and Wellhausen. It is fair to assume that these men in their utterances have given voice to the sentiments of extensive circles.

I am least disturbed by Wellhausen's declaration<sup>1</sup> that the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, VI., p. 233.

function of the theologian and exegete is solely to ascertain the sense which was attributed to the text by the Jewish and New Testament writers,—he is speaking especially in this connection of Apocalyptic writers. Now Wellhausen concedes that we have in fact in the Apocalypses material that is not always fully transfused with the conceptions of the author; but he maintains that it is a matter of utter indifference methodically where this material comes from. The theme of the theologian is solely the material as it appears in its last modification, the one found in the New Testament, and not at all the early history of that material. The antecedents of the material, he says, have perhaps an antiquarian interest, but none for exegesis. In such declarations Wellhausen falls into conflict with fundamental principles which are everywhere recognised in historical science, and which are conceded and followed in other fields by Wellhausen himself. The cardinal principle of historical study is this: That we are unable to comprehend a person, a period, or a thought dissociated from its antecedents, but that we can speak of a real living understanding only when we have the antecedent history. Historical understanding means an understanding built upon the historical associations. Wellhausen himself is a teacher of the first rank in this historical method.

Accordingly, when it is admitted that the material of the Apocalypses really has a history, science will on no condition resign its right of investigating this history, and the conviction must prevail that this investigation has not merely a "certain antiquarian" interest, but rather that the results are indispensable preliminaries to any true and living understanding of the subject. Wellhausen's position on this question would be quite inexplicable, this must be said frankly, but for the assumption that in these general assertions of his he is expressing a personal disinclination to enter upon such investigations.

On the other hand, there is no denying that there is perhaps a danger here,—the danger that in these investigations of the early history the subject proper may be forgotten. The study of the New Testament itself is and must remain the proper subject of New Testament research. Not the "eternal yesterday," but the



eternal present! The whole stress should be laid upon the task of attaining a spiritual comprehension of the eternal present that has developed from the eternal past. If in the following brief studies this task is not fully accomplished, the writer begs his readers not to interpret the failure as signifying that this final goal is not steadily before his eyes. He ventures to refer for confirmation of his attitude in the matter to his other writings, especially his *Commentary on Genesis* and his *Creation and Chaos*, in which he has attempted to do justice to this task. But in the questions that are to be treated in the following pages, in which our religio-historical research is still in its beginnings, and especially in these lines which attempt to condense in brief an enormous material, we can expect only to call attention to certain points which have a religio-historical significance. If this beginning is correct, there need be no fear that the rest will follow of itself.

Another danger in connection with the history of religion would be that of forgetting in our scholastic zeal the great personages concerned. For this is the great question which tests all historians of our day: whether persons or tendencies constitute history. Formerly, and not so very long ago either, the danger was, ignoring historical tendencies; now in our socialistic age it is, overlooking persons. There is no universal rule for the case. On the contrary, history shows a remarkable and highly varied complex of the two factors. I take pleasure in testifying that I first learned to observe this fluctuant play of the interaction of persons and periods in Harnack's lectures. Religio-historical investigations are concerned preëminently, as a matter of course, with periods and tendencies. But such investigations do not need to be utterly blind to the importance of individuals. We can do the one without omitting the other. Who, for instance, could be so lacking in insight as to be able to deny the all-surpassing greatness of, let us say, Paul, not to speak of Jesus! And under no circumstances may we speak of "estimating"<sup>1</sup> individuals! Every individual, however humble,

---

<sup>1</sup> The word "estimate" translates the German "*verrechnen*," which here means "to compute in detail" or "to reduce to figures," i. e., "to calculate," an expression used by Harnack.

has his mystery, which we may perhaps transcribe, but not "estimate."

Here also we may await with confidence the further development of religio-historical scholarship. And if occasionally in the mind of an ill-balanced or immature person the great heroes of religion should sink into the shade, surely they are themselves great enough to furnish promptly the corrective of this error. In the end, our religio-historical research will only lead to a better understanding of the great personages. And once more I beg the reader not to expect that these few lines will point him the whole distance to the individuals. Here, where we are engaged in laying foundations, this last achievement can find no place, or at least only by way of suggestion.

Again, Harnack has warned us not to lay too much stress on "arabesques." In every great historical religion there are to be found, along with the living thoughts, all sorts of incidental material from antiquity that may be compared with the decorations of a work of art. True scholarship, which knows how to recognise the just proportions of greatness, lays all the stress on the vital thoughts. Yet on the other hand, the investigation even of arabesques has a certain value, for it is our object to become acquainted with the historical phenomenon not only in its chief features, but as a whole, even in its corners and side passages. Moreover, it would not be unheard of in the modern study of the New Testament to devote attention to trifles, and often the investigation of such petty ornaments has an especial significance. One who is occupied in the excavation of an ancient building, the origin of which he does not know, will not regard it as lacking significance if he finds exclusively Gothic ornaments, for he will infer from them that the whole structure was built in the Gothic style. Thus we infer from the ornaments of Phœnician art that have been preserved that the whole Phœnician civilisation rested upon a combination of Babylonian and Egyptian civilisations. Accordingly we are justified if at present, when we are just beginning the religio-historical investigation of the New Testament, we begin with seeming trifles. "Despise not the day of small things." However, we will accept

Harnack's warning not to linger too long over trifles, but pass, as soon as ever possible, to things of greater moment.

#### SKETCH OF LATE ORIENTAL RELIGIONS.

What we now have to offer is the evidence that certain points of the New Testament are of foreign origin.

We must begin with a general sketch of the condition of Oriental nations, and especially of the religions of the Persian and the Greek empires.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to Church history we are accustomed to explain that there was in the Roman Empire a tremendous intermingling of races and accordingly also a remarkable blending of religions. The same conditions had prevailed in the Orient several centuries earlier. The power of the many great and small races and of the national states and civilisations had already been broken down by the arms of the Assyrians. The nations having grown used to the foreign yoke submitted almost without resistance to the conqueror of the hour. Secure highways in prolonged periods of peace promote increased international commerce. Races mingle, partly as a result of the compulsory regulations of the conquerors, such as deportation, and partly on the paths of commerce: in all the great Oriental cities there are foreign colonies; as early as the seventh century B. C. there were already five Canaanite cities in Egypt (Isaiah xix.). In a Minæan (South Arabian) inscription incidental mention is made of the nationality of the female slaves who were dedicated to the gods: they came from Egypt, Ammon, Moab, Dedan, Quedar, and Gaza. In this commingling of races customs are levelled. All nations participate in the common civilisation of Southwestern Asia. "Of all nations," says Herodotus, "the Persians most easily adopt foreign customs." In the Persian Empire this civilisation employs the Aramaic language. As early as the Assyrian times Aramaic had become the language of trade and of international diplomacy; in the Persian Empire it was the official language of the Persian representatives even far beyond the borders of the Semitic world, even in Asia Minor and

---

<sup>1</sup> See Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, III.

the Troad. The Aramaic writing made its way during the Persian dominion into the western portions of India. And finally entire populations adopted the Aramaic language; such was the case in Palestine, Phœnicia, and Babylonia, while in Arabia the Aramaic even became the literary language. This development is paralleled by the process which latinised Gaul, Spain and North Africa under the Roman Empire. In the age of Greek dominion Greek civilisation overspread the Orient, but the Aramaic persisted as a substratum.

In these times of general race-mingling the ancient religions, too, suffered disintegration. Religions lost their former political environment and began to surrender their distinctively national features. Formerly the concern of the state and the whole people, religion now became the affair of the individual. The merchant, the mechanic, the soldier, the slave, each takes his religion with him into foreign parts and there makes propaganda for it. Thus religions were transplanted, various religions were mingled, and native religions became loaded with foreign elements. In that age Babylonian gods were met with in Edessa, in Bambouk, in Palmyra and in Sidon. In the Arabian emporium of Taima there are inscriptions in the Aramaic literary dialect; on them the Arabian god wears Assyrian garments and an Assyrian beard, but a quasi-Egyptian helmet; above him is seen the southwest-Asiatic (Syro-Phœnician) modification of the winged sun-disc derived from the Egyptians; the priest and the image of the god are of Egyptian origin.

The king of Byblos appears in Persian garb and with Persian beard before the tutelary goddess of the city who is represented like an Egyptian. In Commagene the Greek deities were identified with the Persian: Zeus with Ahuramazda, Herakles and Ares with Artagnes, etc. A characteristic example from a later period is offered by an Egyptian relief from the Roman Empire, representing Horus mounted on horseback and striking down the crocodile with a lance. In this, the hawklike head of the god is Egyptian, while the mounting of the god on horseback is entirely un-Egyptian: the latter feature being rather in consonance with a Persian

representation of the serpent-slayer, which is preserved. The garb of the god is that of a Roman general. And this figure is the prototype of our St. George! (Roscher's *Lexikon*, article "Horus" by Ed. Meyer.)

The aforementioned modification of the winged sun-disc, which is derived from Egypt, and which the Assyrians took over from the Syro-Phœnician civilisation and selected as a symbol of their national deity Assur, was in its turn adopted by the Persians as a symbol of their god: Babylonian elements in the Persian civilisation are: the seven planets as the rulers of destiny, strange-shaped hybrid beings often found on Persian seals; the belief that certain spirits have charge of the twelve months, and of every day, or even of every period of the day, etc.

Thus do religions begin to resemble one another even in content. For instance, the belief that there is a proper time for everything, which the adept can figure out, a belief which is primarily of Babylonian origin; furthermore, the belief in seven supreme divinities; certain myths, such as that of the struggle of the god of light with the monster of chaos; sorcery, eschatology, the doctrine of immortality,—all these spread in that period over the entire Orient.

#### GNOSTICISM AND MANDÆISM.

In a later period in the Orient we see new organisations, the beginnings of which we may place in the opening of the Greek era. We usually make our first acquaintance with these organisations when they carry their propaganda over upon Greco-Roman territory. We do not know at present where and when they arose in the Orient, but we can designate them by a name that was used in these circles esoterically, as Gnostics (Mandæans). These organisations are exceedingly various in nature, and very complex in structure: they are the product of the great commingling of religions and had extensive reciprocal influences. The earlier Mandæan religion, according to the opinion of W. Brandt,<sup>1</sup> is founded

---

<sup>1</sup> Brandt, *Mandäische Schriften*, P. XII ff.

upon Parsi, Babylonian and Jewish elements. At the beginning of the second century A. D., Mandæism adopted certain Christian elements, the intermediaries being Christian Gnostics. In the third and fourth centuries there were introduced on the one hand the Parsi doctrine of the opposition of the spheres of light and darkness, and on the other Christian monotheism, and with this there arose a bitter hostility between Mandæism and Catholic Christianity.

A similar picture is represented by the Mithraic religion, which is related to the organisations just described. According to Cumont<sup>1</sup> the lowermost and most primitive stratum in the Mithraic religion is of Iranian origin; in Babylonia there was spread upon this a heavy deposit of Semitic doctrines; in Asia Minor the local cultus modified this somewhat; and finally Hellenic civilisation put its glossy varnish over the whole.

Now, varied as these "Gnostic" organisations are, and few as are the sources which we have for the study of the earlier pre-Christian and pre-Jewish Gnosticism, yet we are enabled by retro-reference from the later forms to obtain an approximate notion of the earlier period. In the following we give a sketch which sums up especially those features in which earlier Mandæism and Gnosticism agree. Most characteristic feature of all is the pessimism which laid hold of the old and decadent races. It seemed to them that this world was in a bad way; man longed to escape from this transitory world to a better life, to the immortality of the serene gods.

Corresponding to this pessimistic ground tone was the division of the universe into an upper realm of light, the realm of the good, and an under world of darkness, the realm of the evil powers; the earth, a mixture of the two, lies midway between them. Myths relate how this earth arose as a mixture of good and bad. Man himself belongs to both spheres: his soul to the upper, his body to the lower. The ambition of the human heart is, freed from this earth and all things corporeal, to pass through the range of heavens

<sup>1</sup> In Roscher's *Lexikon*, article "Mithra"; also Cumont's articles on Mithra in *The Open Court* for March and April, 1902.

which rise one above the other, into the presence of the supreme God, there to dwell forever. To such an immortality does man attain after death, if in this life he has been initiated into the secret rites and knows the names which procure him entrance to the heavens. In order to impart these rites to men, and to break down the powers of darkness, one of the higher gods, the divine Saviour himself, descended into the lower realms of the universe.

This religion existed in the form of secret sects. The national religions at that time had outlived their usefulness; they were no longer able to satisfy the deepest needs of the men of that day. But those of like mind gathered in secret brotherhoods; the Orient must have been full of these secret sects, a condition corresponding to that of the multitude of petty states in former times. A characteristic of these brotherhoods is that they offered no sacrifices,—the human mind had emancipated itself from that,—but they celebrated a multitude of sacraments: ablutions, crowning with wreaths, anointing, water-drinking, bread-eating, etc. The dualistic sentiment leads naturally to asceticism. These religions are derived from polytheism, and consequently are familiar with a multitude of divine beings. But on the other hand, these are no longer the ancient national divinities, or at least they are reduced to lesser dignity (in Mandæism the seven great Babylonian deities are but subordinate beings, although they are still the lords of this world). And it is especially notable that the adherents of these sects, instead of designating the persons of the gods by proper names, prefer to characterise them with abstract titles: Life, Light, the Word of Life, Wisdom, Knowledge. A mark of the vocabulary of the secret sects is that they employ common words of daily life in peculiar technical meanings, in order to preserve their mysteries; thus in Mandæism the æons are named with such words as “doors,” “houses,” “the grapevine,” etc. Or they used mysterious combinations, as “the water of life,” “the second death,” “the great light,” “the first man,” etc. These are some of the simple elements of Gnosticism as it must have prevailed from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean in the time of the great religious solstice.

## RELATION OF JUDAISM TO LATER ORIENTAL RELIGIONS.

We come now to the position of Judaism in this Oriental world. For some time before the Babylonian Exile Israel had ceased to be a people with a wholly independent, autochthonous civilisation; it had been filled with alien material for a long time. At present the more the once unknown world of the Orient becomes familiar to us, the more clearly do we see how great the influence of neighboring nations was upon Israel, and especially that of Babylon; or at least, we might see it, for the willingness of scholars to enter upon such religio-historical investigations in the Old Testament field is none too great. There are a number of fields which are touched by this foreign influence upon Israel, the one in which we can at present see most clearly being that of the myths of creation.

For the study of the New Testament also it is not without a certain value to become acquainted with these Old Testament investigations; first, because conditions are more clearly defined in the Old Testament, and secondly, because we are in part dealing with the same elements which from the earliest times down to the New Testament period have again and again influenced Israel from foreign countries. Of all these many groups of elements the most important is a field that has thus far scarcely been mentioned in this connection, that of eschatology. The eschatology of the prophets and psalmists is in its way strongly Israelitic in appearance: it deals with Israel and Yahveh; yet to a large extent it employs images and conceptions that involve the destruction of the universe and the development of a new world, images which are mythological in their nature and cannot have originated on Israelitic soil. Thus we hear of enormous world-catastrophes, of a great world-storm, of a world-conflagration, of an immense deluge, terrible hosts of horsemen dash down upon the world from the North, the monsters of the deep get loose, a new Chaos will ensue. But then a new day will break; God will create a new heaven and a new earth; on earth a new Golden Age will begin, and even in Hades



the light of the divinity will be seen. In many passages it is perfectly clear that we are dealing here with primitive myths of creation, which have taken on a new eschatological significance: at the end of time there will come about what actually was at the beginning.

That these eschatological features are actually of mythological origin, and are based specifically upon a transference of myths of origin to the end of the world, is clearly seen from such a passage as Jeremiah iv. 23 ff., where the coming destruction is named with the primitive word *tohu vabohu*, and again from the description of the coming reign of peace among the animals, Isaiah xi. 6 ff., where the primitive myth of the Golden Age is transferred to the end of time, and finally and particularly, from all those passages in which recurs as a prophecy the primitive myth of the dominion of the sea and its dragons over the world. Such mythological elements appear with increasing clearness in the later and the latest times; in the earlier times they are less numerous and at the same time of a more strongly Israelitic type. But they are present from the beginning: even Isaiah speaks of the approaching roar of the floods and of their sudden expulsion by the thunder of Yahveh's speech at the beginning of the new day (Isaiah xvii).

Thus we see how for centuries a foreign mythological eschatology was streaming into Israel, contributing to Israelitish prophecy its impulse, its temper, and an abundance of material. As long as the Israelitic religion was in its vigor, it assimilated actively this foreign material; in later times, when religion had become relaxed in strength, it swallowed foreign elements feathers and all. Accordingly it must be our method in these matters to interpret the descriptions of the early prophets, which are often almost unrecognisable as regards their origin, in the light of the much clearer writings of the later prophets and the Apocalypses. The figure of the Messiah itself is found among this originally mythical material. It is true, the new David or son of David whom the prophets expect is only a human being, although endowed with divine powers, and the hope that such a king would arise and bring joy to Israel is at first purely national. And yet there are some features in this

royal figure which lead to the conclusion that the expected king was originally a divine king. Even in Isaiah (Chap. ix) he receives titles which really do not belong to a human being: Mighty God, Everlasting Father; in Isaiah xi. he is the king of the Golden Age in which the wolf and the lamb shall lie down together; and it is particularly noticeable that in several passages his birth is celebrated in mysterious language and the salvation of Israel is hoped for as a result: a human child just born cannot be of aid to his people, but it is different with a divine child! It is to be observed also that other prophets and many psalmists also speak of a god who shall become king of the whole world; this is Yahveh whose coronation and ascent into heaven in the end of days are particularly alluded to by the psalmists. The whole material takes shape most perfectly if we assume that there is at the base of the Israelitic hope for a king an alien and mythical hope, in accordance with which a new god shall ascend the throne of the world as king. And accordingly we are not at all surprised when in the later Apocalypses we meet a celestial figure, who is some time to descend upon earth and here establish a kingdom of bliss. This figure is no new creation of Apocalyptic Judaism, but it is the same figure which is in the background of the prophetic expectations.

Thus, then, we see by an example that the Israelitic religion had already received very strong influences from foreign countries even before the Exile. And as a result of the Exile these foreign influences upon Judaism became very much stronger. The people, separated from their home, without political life, under alien governors, as time passed scattered more and more over the whole earth, lost a great part of its national character; it adapted itself to Aramaic civilisation; it gradually learned a new calling (that of merchant), a new written character, a new calendar, new weights and measures, and even, finally, a new language. This whole modification was about completed in the time of Jesus. By that time the Jews had really become another nationality: from being a tribe of Israel, it had been changed into an Aramaic religious community.

The Exile, then, marks a decisive epoch in the development

of Jewish civilisation ; of their native national life there was retained in permanence only such elements as were closely related to religion. For religion offered the strongest possible opposition to the danger of denationalisation which was at that time clearly impending. We know from the demonstrations of Wellhausen that the great religious reform which determined the future tendency of Judaism, the reform of the Priestly Code, was introduced at that time. Judaism, in imminent danger of sinking out of sight in the maelstrom of races, gathered all its forces together and determined to exclude as far as possible all foreign influences. And thus the first condition that is revealed to us after the Exile is a surprising one: Judaism, which in all other fields was growing every day more Aramaic, is preserving its religion on the whole undefiled. And yet we must bear in mind that underneath the official exclusive current there ran a current of syncretism from which now and then fragments come to the surface. Thus we see in that period among the new acquisitions especially eschatology with its constant tendency to grow more mythological ; a documentary evidence of this undercurrent of syncretism is seen especially in the Book of Zechariah, in which is to be found an abundance of originally mythological material.

#### JUDAISM IN THE CENTURY BEFORE CHRIST.

At the beginning of the second century before Christ the power of Judaism, which had been languishing constantly under the foreign yoke and the wretched social conditions, seemed to be exhausted. Let the reader turn to the last Psalms, the last Prophets, to Jesus Sirach and to Chronicles, in order to realise how the religious vigor is relaxing in every field. But the insane attempt of Antiochus to paganise Judaism by force renewed its life. The Church community, forced into a life and death struggle, rose with a mighty effort. A new epoch began with the rebellion of the Maccabees. It is evident that new social elements entered at that time into the history of the people and its religion, and therewith new thoughts came to the surface. This is the second, and for us the

more important, period of Judaism, for out of the womb of this regenerated Judaism did Christianity come to the light.

The learning of the scribes was by no means extinguished at that time, but on the contrary experienced a new revival. Pharisaism was one of the dominant powers of the period ; but the popular impression that Pharisaism was ultimately the one exclusively valid and characteristic manifestation of the Judaism of that epoch is untenable. Pharisaism assumed the exclusive lead only after the excision of Christianity and after the great conflicts with the Romans under Titus and Hadrian, when again a new epoch begins. In the earlier period Judaism was more richly developed. Here were to be found along with the learning of the scribes other tendencies with which the Apocalypses are connected, tendencies that inflamed the people to attempts at rebellion, which produced men who came forward with the claim that they were prophets or even the promised Christ himself. All the Apocalypses claim to be cryptographs and reproduce traditional mysteries. Accordingly we must presume that there existed at that day certain circles which employed these mysteries for their edification and which avoided publicity. It is from this period that we learn of the secret league of the Essenes. The secret traditions of the Apocalypses deal especially with eschatology, angelology, and cosmology. And this is the very point at which foreign elements entered Judaism in full stream. The new cosmology, the doctrine of the seven heavens, of the supermundane paradise, of hell, and of the other mysterious regions of the world ; the division of the world into the realm of light which is God's, and the realm of darkness, ruled over by Satan ; the extraordinarily developed angelology, which is nothing else than a sort of reduced polytheism ; the new eschatology, which wholly rejects this world as being full of sin and misery, and looks forward to a new one, and which expects to see a Messiah coming in the clouds of heaven :—this entire and various mass of material is not of Jewish origin, although it is strongly tinged with Judaism in the form preserved to us. It is only necessary to read a prophet or a psalmist and follow this up with the book of Enoch in order to appreciate the tremendous difference. The greater part of all

that constitutes this difference does not appeal to us. Incontestably there was at that time danger that religion might be stifled beneath the weight of this grotesque and barbaric mysticism; and yet we must not ignore the fact that a new life was stirring beneath these peculiar forms. For that epoch contained in these fragile vessels a very precious treasure, the doctrine of the resurrection. The doctrine of the resurrection is not, as was formerly quite commonly maintained, and is even now maintained to some extent, the product of Judaism, but it was imported from a far country.

#### SOURCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION.

In view of the immeasurable significance which this doctrine has for the understanding of the New Testament, it seems proper to linger over the subject. In order to derive the origin of this belief from unperverted Judaism, the Old Testament narratives of the translation of Enoch and Elias have been cited, but without warrant; for we are different from Enoch and Elias. No person, be he ever so pious, dreams of expecting the destiny of these heroes in his own case. Or again, certain passages in the Psalms have been quoted, according to which God will save the souls of the pious from the grave. But what the faithful expects in this connection is not the resurrection from the dead, but rather something very different, namely that God will save him in present danger and not permit his soul to go down into sheol (the grave). Neither did this belief come from the familiar passage in Job (xix. 25): Job thinks for a moment of the possibility that God may justify him even after death. But this belief plays but a transient rôle in the body of the book; and withal such a world-stirring thought does not take its origin from a single passage in the Bible, but rather from a profound necessity of the human heart.

We meet the belief in the resurrection for the first time in Daniel vii., where the resurrection of certain saints and certain sinners is expected. Accordingly, it is commonly declared that the belief in the resurrection is a product of the age of the Maccabees: in this terrible crisis, when so many martyrs perished, people comforted themselves with the hope that they would necessarily be re-

warded after death, and later this belief became general. But this too is but a superficial attempt to trace the origin of the belief.

Great things do not arise by chance, but have always great causes. And the belief in the resurrection of the dead is one of the greatest things in the whole history of religion. With the introduction of this doctrine there has resulted a great alteration in the depths of the religious consciousness; the whole world stands thenceforth in another light. The ancient religion of Israel had stood with both feet planted upon this earth; what it had desired of its God was first of all the goods of this world, whereas the new age learned ever more and more to despise the goods of this world and to reach out for the supernatural. The dark side of this faith in another world is a strongly pessimistic judgment of the present. When men began to despair of this world, religion threw itself with all its might into the world to come.

The belief in the resurrection arose from the longing of the human soul which cannot be satisfied with the common destiny of death, but longs to get away from this world of weakness and transitoriness into a new, blissful and imperishable life. Since this belief entered into religion, everything is changed; the day about which all religious meditation centers is the day of judgment; the great question which appeals to every individual is: Will you be one of those who will be justified in that day and who will inherit eternal life, or will you be condemned? What immense significance this belief assumed for practical religion may be observed in iv. Ezra, in Paul, or in the Gospels. This significance of the belief in the resurrection is so great that we may accordingly divide the whole history of the Jewish-Christian religion into two periods.

A belief of this immense importance does not take its rise from the generalisation of a single passage in the Bible, but must have much deeper and more potent causes. How then did this belief come into Judaism? Without doubt Judaism was at that time prepared for the belief by its individualism and its increasing pessimism; if it had not been prepared, it would scarcely have laid hold of it so eagerly. And yet, it did not originate the belief; we cannot find its origins in Judaism, but all at once it is there, and it

comes along with a new cosmology, with the conceptions of a supernatural paradise and of the fiery pit of hell. It is very evident from these accompanying conceptions that it comes from the Orient. Indeed, we may go further. The comparison of the transfigured body of the blessed with the stars, with the aural bodies of the angels, which are so very frequent in late Judaism and in the New Testament, show us that this belief was brought to Judaism from a stellar religion in which it was the ideal of the faithful to be snatched away from the transitoriness of the earth and to become like unto the ever-beaming divine stars. This postulate which is derived exclusively from the observation of Judaism, is abundantly confirmed by what we know of the contemporary religions of the Orient. It is well known that the belief in life after death has long been present in a number of Oriental religions, for example, the Egyptian and the Persian, and that the whole Orient was filled with it at the time of which we are speaking. It is not remarkable that Judaism also finally adopts this belief, but rather is it strange that it resisted the belief so long.

#### JUDAISM A SYNCRETIC RELIGION.

If we survey the entire, almost boundless, field of the whole mass of the material that was adopted by Judaism at that time, we may say without exaggeration that the Judaism of certain schools must frankly be called a syncretic religion. Notably in the exceedingly pronounced angelology, polytheistic or in some cases dualistic tendencies have insinuated themselves into the monotheism, thus differentiating this Judaism most decidedly from the classic religion of the prophets and the psalms. Now we must suppose that different circles assumed very different attitudes toward all these new notions: the Sadducees, who, we are told, do not believe in angels and deny the resurrection from the dead, assume an unfavorable attitude; the Apocalypses are saturated with it; Pharisaism occupies a middle ground. But certain notions, such as the belief in the resurrection, become common property even of the populace which has no theological bias. And so the age of Jesus presents a remarkable picture: Judaism is most strongly influenced from two

opposite sides,—among the Jews of the Dispersion in the West especially by Hellenism, and among the Jews of the Eastern dispersion and in Palestine chiefly by the Orient.

#### CHRISTIANITY A SYNCRETIC RELIGION.

In what has preceded we have attempted to present a picture of syncretic Judaism in the age of Jesus. It was necessary to make this characterisation somewhat detailed, because otherwise the propositions that are to follow would seem to be floating in the air. For what is to follow our thesis is: That Christianity, which was born of syncretic Judaism, has strong syncretic features. Primitive Christianity, which resembles a river, sprang from two main sources: the one comes from the Old Testament, and the other by the way of Judaism from alien Oriental religions. And to these is to be added in the Occident the Greek factor. And here let it be expressly emphasised, that we make a pronounced distinction between the Gospels and Christianity, and that the following paragraphs will speak only of Christianity, that is, the religion of the first Christian congregations, not of the Gospel, that is, of the message of Jesus himself.

Furthermore, it is to be borne in mind that the religion which influenced Judaism from the time of the Maccabees, and elements of which now once more came into the light of history in Christianity, has not yet been named. But surely we shall make no mistake if we assume that it is the same religion which developed later in Mandæism and Gnosticism; yet it would unnecessarily burden our argument if we were to lay the chief stress on this fact. In any case, we shall abstain in what follows—at least with a few exceptions—from pursuing the history of this religion further back and distinguishing in it the Babylonian, the Persian and the Egyptian elements. All this is of secondary interest for the investigator of Judaism and especially for the student of the New Testament. For him it is of first importance to recognise that certain elements of the Jewish and Christian religions are borrowed, and to determine the primitive character of these alien elements. But this is all very possible merely from the sources of the Old Testament, of



Judaism and of the New Testament which are accessible to the Bible student. If we limit thus the material with which we are to work, we have the advantage of dealing with a subject that is accessible and distinct, and upon the basis of which we can therefore make tolerably certain inferences.

The course we are to pursue in the succeeding pages is as follows: We shall assume that we arrive at the New Testament from the Old Testament by way of Judaism. We are already prepared to see much that is new in Judaism that is not found in the Old Testament and is by no means anticipated there. But now we arrive at the New Testament, and we are astonished to meet there an abundance of new elements which strike us as very peculiar. They are by no means from the Old Testament; indeed they are opposed in some vital points to the deepest religious sentiments of the Old Testament, to the religion of the prophets and the psalmists. By many evidences we recognise that these elements do not come from the great personages who created the primitive Christian religion, although as a matter of course they passed through the mind of these personages and were thus re-coined. How, then, shall we account for the origin of these elements? We shall understand when we examine their nature.

Among the characteristics of the religion of the Old Testament religion are monotheism and the aversion to all that is mythical; while in contrast with this the most distinct mark of what is not primitively Jewish is the leaning to polytheistic conceptions and to the mythical. Accordingly, one who wishes to undertake such investigations must first of all have a clear conception of the nature of the mythical, and must have his powers of observation trained by the study of mythical subjects from the Orient. In this connection the Babylonian myths of creation are especially instructive, or the later Gnostic myths of the Mandæans. With this preparation he will be able after careful consideration to recognise even in the New Testament elements which have the mythical trace about them. Here, then, one must have the courage to surrender oneself to the impression made by the subjects, and to try by keenness of ear to detect the inmost nature of the elements involved. By

depending upon these negative and positive evidences, we shall be able to designate certain elements as characteristically of Old Testament origin. Then the further question may be permitted, where these notions come from in their last analysis. Of course, this method cannot be followed out for every detail in what follows, but we shall resort sometimes to a somewhat condensed process. But only by pursuing this method in general can we arrive at positive results.

#### THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN.

We shall begin with the Apocalypse of John, although this book represents only a side-line within the entire field of the New Testament, and within the Apocalypse we shall take up only certain elements of the Apocalyptic material, although these are, for the Christian student of the Apocalypse, only on the periphery of his religion. It should be expressly emphasised here that we are now dealing with features that are more or less foreign to true religion. Yet despite this fact, it seems to be necessary to begin at this point, because we are able to see here with especial distinctness. One who is not convinced at this point will surely not regard as conclusive the evidence which is to follow.

The author has already treated in his *Schöpfung und Chaos* some of the points referred to in what follows. He may therefore regard this essay as a continuation of that work. However, the points already treated will be dealt with but briefly, and yet they could not be entirely omitted, because the author cannot assume that his position on these points is generally known, and because an opportunity is thus offered to refer, though it be but briefly, to the objections that have been expressed since the appearance of the above-mentioned book, especially those of Wellhausen. These investigations in the Apocalypse of John are continued especially in the excellent Commentary of Bousset.

Here too I beg permission to formulate my fundamental conviction regarding the Apocalypse of John in a thesis. By form and content the Apocalypse is separated into two parts: the letters, and the Apocalypse proper, from Chapter iv. on. The letters are

Christian in character ; but the Apocalypse proper contains but small portions that are of specifically Christian spirit. In its essential character it is purely Jewish.

This proposition must not be confused with the thesis of the literary critic Vischer: that the Apocalypse of John is a Jewish writing which has been worked over by some editor in a Christian spirit. At present we are simply maintaining that the material of the book, as we now have it, is of essentially Jewish stamp, without undertaking to make any declaration regarding the literary problem involved.

And so for our thesis proper: The subject-matter of the Apocalypse of John in important respects is not of Jewish, but of pagan, origin. It is true, and this is to be expressly emphasised, it has passed through a Jewish intellect, but in the last resort it is to be understood only on the supposition of its foreign origin! It is not our intention, then, to exclude the assumption of Jewish influence in the Apocalypse, but rather to maintain it: and we do not intend to assume foreign origin for all the subject-matter, but only for certain very important portions of it. In so doing we do not by any means deny that other portions of the Apocalypse consist of imitations and expansions of prophetic writings, nor that certain certain features, but yet comparatively little, may be interpreted in the light of contemporary history. Of this entire group of propositions we propose in what follows to offer evidence for the one only: that certain portions of the Apocalypse are of foreign origin.

Such portions are particularly to be noted first of all in the description of the divine enthronisation, Chapter iv. At the beginning we find the 7 torches that burn before the throne of God, which are—so we are told—the 7 spirits of God. These spirits are clearly the same as the 7 angels who stand before the face of God, viii. 2, who according to Tobit, xii. 15, alone have entrance to the glory of the Most High, the 7 archangels. In what high esteem these beings were held by Jewish-Christian tradition is shown by the fact that they are named, i. 4, even before Christ. How old this conception of these seven is, may be seen from Ezekiel ix., where they first appear. These spirits are represented under many sym-

bols: Chapter iv. they are the seven lamps of fire; i. 12 they are seven candlesticks, in the midst of which Christ appears; i. 16 he has seven stars in his hand; v. 6 the lamb has seven eyes. Related to this evidently is the seven-branched candlestick which is described in Exodus xxv. and the somewhat differently shaped one which Zechariah sees in his vision, iv.: Zechariah interprets the lamps of this candlestick as being the eyes of Yahveh, which run through the whole earth.

The question is, how the entire body of these related conceptions, and particularly those in the Apocalypse of John, are to be regarded. How does it come that Judaism and the Apocalypse as well believe in 7 supreme divine beings, which can be represented now as torches, now as candlesticks, now as eyes of God or of Christ, now as stars. The angelology of the Jews—this is the general principle which we follow in arriving at a conclusion—is a sort of reduced or dethroned polytheism. The angels of tribes, of rivers, of countries, of snow and hail, of the sea and the air, of death, etc., were formerly gods who ruled over tribes, countries, rivers, etc. At this point, we may expect, investigators will be most inclined to accept the theory of foreign influence. Accordingly we conjecture that the 7 angels of the Jews are paralleled by 7 gods of the heathen. Inasmuch as the seven angels are the highest among the angels, there must have been in pagandom seven supreme deities. The representation of these seven as candlesticks, torches, eyes and stars goes back evidently to one and the same conception: stars are thought of as the eyes of the divinity, and are represented in the rites of worship as torches or candlesticks. Hence these seven must have been originally stellar deities. And so we conclude that there must have been seven supreme divinities in the Orient, ruling over the stars. Now this inference is most perfectly confirmed by things that we positively know. In the cosmopolitan civilisation of the Babylonians, which had prevailed from time immemorial in the Orient, the seven supreme deities are the seven gods of the planets. As we know, the whole Orient was filled with this belief at that period: we meet it again among the Persians, the Orpheans, the Mandæans, the Gnostics, the Sabians; so this

belief accompanied Babylonian civilisation throughout the world, and influenced Israel and Judaism at various times. And thence comes the belief in the seven spirits in the Apocalypse and in the seven archangels in the Christian Church.

We take up next the 24 elders. They are seated round about the throne of God, themselves on thrones and dressed in garments of royal white, and have golden crowns upon their heads; their number is 24. It was formerly the custom to interpret these figures as being the 12 apostles together with the patriarchs, or as the nations of the 12 tribes doubled by the addition of the Gentile Christians, or as the representatives of the 24 priestly classes: all of which was extremely arbitrary; for judging from the connection, we are dealing here not with human beings, but with angels, and with angels of the highest degree. According to the description and according to their names, these 24 represent the heavenly council of state: they are kings of the world, enthroned and crowned; God is the King of Kings, whose very councillors are kings.

Now whence does this notion come into Judaism? We shall again resort to the conjecture that we have to do with what were originally gods in council. And in fact we find this conception reported among the Babylonians, who have certain twenty-four stellar deities whom they call arbiters of the universe.

A more complicated affair is the interpretation of the four marvellous creatures of this same chapter. It is self-evident that the writer of the Apocalypse used Ezekiel's famous vision of cherubim in the description of these creatures, and also introduced some features from Isaiah's vision of seraphs. But on the other hand, the Apocalyptic writer differs in certain definite points from Ezekiel: Ezekiel depicts the four beings in a remarkable combination with four wheels; the seat of God is at the same time a throne supported by four creatures, and a chariot running on four wheels. But of this entire remarkably incoherent combination the Apocalyptic writer selected only that which had an organic connection, to wit, the creatures that support the throne. In Ezekiel these four creatures have four heads each, those of man, ox, lion and eagle, while in the Apocalypse they have but one each. Here it is evi-

dent that the Apocalyptic writer has the simpler, and therefore the earlier, conception. These creatures also are a sort of "angel," and accordingly we suspect them to be originally gods. There is an especially primitive sound to that feature which attributes to these divinities animal forms; that leads us back to the earliest Oriental times, when the gods were generally represented in animal form. Now what are these four creatures? It is their function to support the divine throne: this is said expressly in Ezekiel, while in the Apocalypse it stands in the background. Now the throne is a symbol of the sky; Ezekiel says this distinctly when he represents God as sitting on the "firmament." Accordingly there are four beings that stand at the four corners of the world and support it with their wings outspread. Moreover, what Ezekiel says of the peculiar movements of these creatures, namely that each can move forward only and that the chariot itself can only advance in the four directions, corresponds perfectly with the motions of the sky: according to the conceptions of antiquity the sky moved by day from East to West, and returned at night under the earth from West to East, while beside this there were the annual motions from North to South and from South to North. Beyond question they were originally constellations, and naturally the four constellations representing the four quarters of the sky, and thence the names: lion, eagle, bull and man. In fact three of these constellations are to be found in the corresponding quarters of the heavens: Leo, Aquila, and Taurus, so that we may cherish the hope that the constellation Homo will yet be discovered in inscriptions.

Another borrowed subject is the representation of the heavenly Jerusalem which descends upon the earth. Here too the assumption would not suffice that the author had chosen passages from the prophets and simply developed them further. On the contrary, the conception of the heavenly Jerusalem is in its nature mythological. For to the question how the belief ever came into existence that there is another and better Jerusalem in the skies, there is only one answer: because the pagans had already declared that there is a divine city in the skies. This notion of the celestial city, then, is only a mythological representation of the sky itself. The

whole process, therefore, was as follows: originally it was the custom to represent the firmament itself as a city of the gods, and then they came to speak of a mysterious city of the gods in the skies. Judaism, which borrowed this belief, called the divine city "Jerusalem."

That this interpretation, which one would think to be self-evident, is the correct one is demonstrated by a number of attributes which are ascribed to the celestial Jerusalem: the city glows with light and glory, with pearls and diamonds. Now light and glory are characteristics of Heaven, and the planets are compared in the Orient with precious stones. The city has twelve gates, and upon the gates twelve angels: the Orient and Judaism as well have much to say of the twelve gates of the sky, over each of which a divinity presides, or among the Jews an angel. The city is of equal length and breadth and height: a peculiar proposition regarding a city, but perfectly intelligible in connection with the sky. Still further, we hear of the wonderful highway of the city,—or a variant of this is the stream which flows through the city: now it is characteristic for the sky that there is a stream in the midst of it, a highway: the Milky Way. Among the Mandæans also and in Greco-Roman tradition we are told of such a wonderful stream that proceeds from the throne of God. That this is the Milky Way has been maintained by Brandt in the case of the Mandæans. The Slavic version of Enoch (the Apocryphal book of this name) describes the Milky Way quite plainly as the celestial stream which is formed from two sources and then divides again into four branches. Even the prophets speak of this stream, which gushes forth from the throne of God. And the notion of the transfiguration of Jerusalem and of the wonderful stream in the midst of the city can be found in the prophets. It is only that the notion appears here in all clearness,—one more foreign element that at various times found its way into Judaism.

The conception of a Jerusalem above is at the same time a clear illustration of the way in which the declaration came to be made that certain persons or things had had a pre-existence in Heaven. Contrary to the usual assumption, this declaration did

not originate from a process of regarding the ultimate goal as the first cause, by means of a remarkable "rhetorical manipulation" (to use Holtzmann's expression<sup>1</sup>), and thus declaring that the valuable was pre-existent, but simply through a transformation under Jewish influence of certain mythological dignitaries, who from their very nature had a pre-existence.

In passing let me refer to the marvellous grasshoppers and the terrible hosts of horsemen which appear at the sound of the fifth and sixth trumpets. It is plain that the famous passage in Joel served as a model for the description of the grasshoppers; but equally plain that the whole of it cannot be explained by reference to this source. The Apocalypse contains a whole series of elements which cannot be interpreted by comparing Joel. Consequently it must have used some independent tradition. Now what can this tradition have been? What sort of grasshoppers are they which come forth from the smoke of wide-open Hell, which have tails like scorpions wherewith they sting men? What sort of horses are these which spit fire out of their lion's mouths? One needs only to raise this question in order to receive from all sides the answer: they are mythological creatures, animal composites such as the religious imagination of the Orient was fond of painting.

Finally, let me refer to the arrangement of the plagues in the Apocalypse of John. These plagues are regularly divided into seven periods; occasionally, as in the case of the four Apocalyptic horsemen, we can discern that the material was originally divided into four periods. Accordingly there is at the bottom of this arrangement the conviction that the end of the world would be divided into four or seven periods, or, as other Apocalyptic writers say, into twelve periods. This tradition corresponds to the other one, that the whole age of the world is to be divided into that number of periods. This latter tradition, originally to be interpreted from astronomical observations, is found not only in Judaism but everywhere in the Orient, and comes in the first place from Babylon. And so too in these visions of plagues, we meet in part primitive

---

<sup>1</sup> *Theologie*, I., p. 406.



oriental material, a fact that is not without significance for the interpretation of individual details.

#### THE APOCALYPTIC DRAGON.

But the capital illustration of this whole attempt at the interpretation of the Apocalypse by reference to mythical elements from the Orient is the traditions of dragons, especially those of the birth of the Messiah, Chapter xii. Here is really the point where we may have our eyes opened. The proposition that mythical elements are to be found in Chapter xii. has already been published more than once. On account of the resemblance of the passage to the Greek myth of the birth of Apollo, Dieterich conjectured Greek origin for it. Next the present author undertook to prove that the passage is in its very nature mythological, and tried to interpret it as a Babylonian myth. Bousset agrees with me in the principle contention: that there are mythical elements involved, but differs with me on many other questions, as to whether the passage came to the last Christian Apocalyptic writer through a Jewish tradition, or whether he selected it of his own notion, whether this independence of the last hands that manipulated the material should be regarded as greater or less, etc. It is the especial merit of Bousset to have suggested the comparison with an Egyptian myth.

But we shall not consider here the various points in which Bousset and the writer differ, but only the one fundamental point, that this chapter is based upon mythical tradition. For this is after all the essential matter for the present in our scientific treatment of the chapter. Whether the material is originally Babylonian or Egyptian is a secondary consideration: later generations may tax their brains over that. The task that our generation has to perform is to prove that it is in its very nature a god-myth. And it does not seem to be superfluous to discuss this point a second time, for only a short time ago no less a scholar than Wellhausen published an interpretation of the chapter "on the basis of contemporaneous history" in the customary fashion, entirely ignoring the mythical origin of the chapter.

A "dragon" is a creature of the religious imagination: it is in

its very nature a mythical being, a pagan divinity. Narratives that deal with dragons are by their very nature pagan myths. Accordingly when we meet with dragons in ancient Israel, in Judaism or even in the Apocalypse of John, when stories are told of them, or such stories are assumed as familiar, the first suggestion of explanation is that we are dealing with pagan dragon myths. This does not mean that every individual feature that is connected with a dragon in the Apocalypse of John is of this nature, but that we are justified in examining it with a view to such explanation.

Now for the details of Chapter xii. A woman appears in the sky, her garment the sun, beneath her feet the moon, a wreath of twelve stars upon her head. And we ask: What is such a woman in her very nature? How did men ever come to talk of such a celestial personage? In Judaism such a personage is seldom met with: for the celestial personages of Judaism, the angels, are almost without exception men. But paganism is familiar with feminine personages also. And the adornments, too, which that woman wears are clearly characteristic of a celestial goddess: similar Oriental representations are familiar to us. Furthermore we are told that the woman is with child, and cries out in the pains of travail. A celestial woman personage, with child, and crying out in the pains of travail is entirely foreign to the character of the Jewish-Christian angelology: in heaven there is neither begetting nor bringing forth. This feature also has a decidedly mythological sound. But most remarkable of all is the touch, that the woman succumbs to the travail pains and cries out. It is a strange notion that such glorious beings, who rule over sun and moon, should have pains, actual bodily pains,—a notion which can be understood only in a mythological sense. And an unprejudiced person, to whom one should read this beginning of the story for the first time, with the question, What sort of a story is this? would surely reply: It is a myth!

Before the woman stands a mighty, fiery red dragon with many heads and horns; from the following context we judge that he is the former king of the world, and his home in the pit. Raging he dashes one third of the stars down from the firmament with the

blow of his tail, so immense is the length and size of it. He stands before the woman ready to devour the child as soon as it shall be born. But why does he wish to devour it? We may conjecture from the context that the dragon is the king of the ancient world, and a new king is about to be born; but the old king wishes to maintain his dominion and to get rid of the new one in the simplest manner: he proposes to devour him immediately upon his birth!

What grotesque tale is this? It is a primitive Oriental tale of the gods very similar in tone to the Babylonian and Egyptian myths.

Then come the following two scenes, which are especially distinct: the beginning of a combat among the gods: the dragon attempts to storm the heavens, whereupon a heavenly army comes forth to meet him and overcome him. This is a scene with much resemblance to the combat of the Titans. Parallels are to be found among the Mandæans and the Manichæans. There are especially numerous concrete features in the scene of the flight of the woman: the woman flies away over the earth on the wings of the great eagle, the dragon pursuing; he spews forth a stream after the woman in order to sweep her away; but the earth comes to the woman's assistance and swallows up the stream.

It is particularly easy to recognise the mythical foundation in this; at the birth of the world-king the elements are in commotion; earth and water contend with each other for the solar queen. Parallels to this description of the flight of the woman are to be found in the myths of Apollo and of the birth of Horus. How strained and unsatisfactory Wellhausen's interpretation, that the flight of the woman is here simply the flight of a remnant from the catastrophe brought upon Jerusalem by the Romans; the water and the disposal of it, he says, have no further significance! But if the Apocalyptic writer had wished to say no more than that, could he not have spoken somewhat more distinctly? What was the use of all this imaginative bombast? One would think that every one who has up to the present bothered himself with the attempt to interpret this material by reference to contemporary history would heave a sigh of relief when he heard an explanation

which can really explain the strange character of these elements. And the explanation is: This story is a myth. And specifically, it is as Bousset also recognises, originally the sun-god, born of a celestial goddess, who is pursued by the dragon of hostile floods.

In other features of the dragon traditions also the mythical element appears. The two lamb's horns which are worn by the second beast in Chapter xiii., cannot be explained offhand as symbols of his seductive powers, but must go back to some old mythical tradition. And further, the feature that the dragon and his followers summon the kings of the earth (Chapter xvi.) by frogs; and finally the closing scene, in which the heavens open and a host of celestial horsemen dash forth, the new king mounted on a white horse at their head, bearing on his garments and on his thigh the name by virtue of which he holds dominion over the earth. The dragon is then defeated in combat; once more the scene of a battle of the gods, a mythical battle.

Finally there is some mythical foundation for the story of the two witnesses in Chapter xi. These two personages have been interpreted by Judaism as Moses and Elias, from whom some of the features may indeed be explained; but other features are of an entirely different kind. The beast that rises from the abyss makes war upon them and will overcome them; their bodies lie in the streets of the great city. But after three and a half days the spirit of life will enter into them again and they will rise to heaven in a cloud while their enemies look on. Bousset has cited for comparison here a related tradition of Elias and Enoch who unmask the anti-Christ when he appears in Jerusalem, and in turn are slain by him. Bousset regarded the tradition which appeared in this form in the second century after Christ as the oldest, and proposed to explain the Apocalyptic version from it. But to me this tradition seems to be a later, less mythological, and Judaised form of the legend. In the Apocalyptic passage what seems to me especially mythological is "the beast that rises from the abyss," which is evidently at the last the same creature as the dragon of Chapter xiii., who rules over the waters, and as the first beast of Chapter xiii., which rises up from the sea. Jewish tradition has declared the

two personages who appear as his opponents to be witnesses of God, that is, prophets. But behind this are glimpses of an older interpretation, according to which the "beast" "makes war" upon them. They are, therefore, originally divine warriors, celestial soldiers, who make war upon the beast with weapons, just as afterwards Christ, the young, celestial hero, charges upon the beast mounted on his white horse. Here, too, then, there are mythological features, unmistakable though greatly faded, and accordingly when we read that they are resurrected after three and one-half days and ascend to Heaven on the clouds, we should not be too quick to assume that this is an imitation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to the declarations of the New Testament Jesus Christ ascended into heaven after three days, or on the third day, while in the case of these "witnesses" it was three and a half days. It should not be overlooked that resurrection and ascension are in their nature mythological traits which fit splendidly into this originally mythical context; so we must at least reckon with the possibility that we have here a primitive mythical legend preserved.

Finally we come to the scene in chapter v. At the right hand of God lies a book sealed with seven seals. Judging from the context, the contents of the book consist of the final things, the end of the world. When the seals of the book are loosed, then will come to pass the things that are written in the book. If the book is not opened, the end of the world will not come. A celestial herald summons all the creatures of the whole world to open the seals of the book. In order to open such a book—so at least we must imagine—one must have marvellous, divinely mysterious power, must be initiated into the deepest mysteries, consecrated with the wonderful powers of the supernatural world. But this book is so wonderful, its seals—so we may fancy—are set with such mysterious and awful characters that none of all these powers, great and fearful as they may otherwise be found, are equal to the task of loosing them. This book defies all the magic in Heaven and under the earth! Hitherto there has been a failure to perceive the nature of these notions. This book with the seven seals, by virtue of which the end is to come, and which no one has the power to

open, is a book of necromancy. Magic of all sorts plays an immense rôle in the syncretic religions of the age we are considering. As a parallel we may mention the recently published Egyptian narrative of the book of magic written by the god Thoth, which is contained in a sixfold chest and guarded by a gigantic serpent on an island covered with serpents. Here, then, in the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse of John we have documentary proof that similar notions of magic entered Judaism and Christianity also.

The following scene describes how the opening of the book comes to pass: Into the group of divine beings enters a new figure. Whence it comes, we are not told; that remains a divine secret. This being receives the book from the hand of God and has the power to open it. Thereupon all creatures bow before him, for unto him worship is due. He has power greater than that of all others; he is the magician superior to all other magicians; at his command the end of the world will come. What is here described is the enthronement of a new god, the lord of the book, the lord of the end of all.

In the Apocalypse of John as we have it this scene is applied to Jesus; but at bottom it is altogether out of harmony with his character: this figure of the great god of magic who opens the book, this figure with seven horns and seven eyes, is utterly alien to the historical Jesus, and can have been identified with him only long afterwards. In the whole vision there is very little that is specifically Christian, and somewhat more that is Jewish. Most notable of all the Jewish elements is the fact that the monotheistic point of view is maintained. There must have been a certain school of Jews who spoke of a great being who was to come and who, by virtue of his magic power, would be recognised in the divine council as supreme, and would finally bring in the end of the world. And indeed we have in Ezra a passage which expressly assails the belief that the last judgment would come about through another being than God.<sup>1</sup> But in the last analysis this belief in the appearance of a new personage cannot be explained adequately on Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup> IV. Ezra vi. 1 ff.

foundations alone; we must assume that this belief pervaded alien religions which influenced Judaism: a religion which represents as a great magician the god in whom it places its hope, must have indulged in much sorcery while it prevailed.

Up to this point we have found in the Apocalypse of John an abundance of legends which, according to our conclusions, must have existed at some time in Judaism; but only a small portion of these legends is expressly authenticated in the Jewish, and especially in the Apocalyptic, writings preserved to us. It is very important to recognise this fact; only a small portion of the entire and manifold life of Judaism in the time of Christ is known to us. As we now know, there must have been in the neighborhood of a hundred Apocalyptic books; and many legends, perhaps for the very reason that they were secret legends, were never committed to writing. What would be known of the Essenes, for instance, if we had not the few references in Josephus and Philo! It is exceedingly important to see this point, for modern investigators are too much inclined to assume altogether too quickly that thoughts and conceptions which are not authenticated in the Jewish writings at present preserved to us could not have existed at all. On the other hand, it is to be said that, after the rise and excision of primitive Christianity and after the great Roman devastations, Judaism grew intensely onesided. And particularly did it discourage those tendencies from which primitive Christianity had developed. Thus it comes that the particular school of Judaism which we meet in the New Testament, and in the New Testament speculations, drops out of sight. We are obliged to reconstruct it anew from the New Testament itself.

Furthermore, what we have hitherto noted of the Christology of the Apocalypse of John is of great significance. The Christian circles which took up the Apocalypse identified the magician-god of chapter v., the boy who is saved from the dragon, the young hero who overcomes the dragon, with their master, Jesus. How this was possible is very obvious: Jesus was the Christ,—that was their fundamental conviction. And so they transferred to Jesus all that they already believed regarding the Christ. And thus traits

that are utterly alien and most grotesque became attributes of Jesus. This observation seems to be of particular importance. For something quite similar came to pass in the speculative theology of the New Testament. In the entire Christology of the New Testament the historical person of Jesus and his impression is but one factor, while the chief features of that Christology come, not from the historical Jesus, but arose independently of him. On this point we shall have more to say at the end.

#### MYTHS IN THE GOSPELS.

We come now to the narratives of the Gospels. The Gospel narratives of Jesus, which are derived from the oral tradition of the oldest congregation, contain on the whole extraordinarily good historical substance, but along with this also many legendary expansions, adornments, and touches that have been carried over from the Old Testament. And besides this historical and in part legendary material there is still another stratum of narratives which are in part of a different origin. These narratives gather before and after the historical traditions proper, before the appearance of Jesus and after his death. Among these narratives we may expect to find such as are properly legends of gods and heroes, and which were attached to Jesus at a later time.

The most characteristic and obvious example of these originally mythical tales is found in the Stories of Jesus's Childhood. The fundamental motive of both the narratives of the childhood of Jesus is that Jesus was born, without the participation of any man, of a virgin, through the mysterious influence of a divine spirit. This *motif* is in its very nature mythical; it is essentially the same that is told of their heroes by the people round about. As is well known, Celsus was reminded by it of Danae, of Melanippe, of Auge and Antiope; but even Justin says: "We are introducing nothing new in comparison with your sons of Zeus; for you know how many sons of Zeus are cited by your highly esteemed writers."

But the primitive Christian stories of the infancy of Jesus differ above all from these pagan myths by their greater delicacy and reserve: in the place of the god who goes into the maid we have



the holy spirit, who overshadows the virgin. What actually takes place remains in mystery, only remotely hinted at by delicate words. It is particularly noteworthy also that in this connection the word "spirit of God" is employed: for as is well known the word is in Hebrew feminine, and is comparatively inconcrete;—a masculine word in this connection would have been too coarse.

Now it has long been recognised that this conception is wholly alien to the notion of divinity peculiar to pure and proper Judaism. The Judaism that is derived from the Old Testament, it has correctly been said, might speak of the miraculous creation of a child, but not of its miraculous begetting through a divine agent. Justly enough we are reminded of the shudder with which the mingling of the sons of God with the daughters of men is mentioned in the sixth chapter of Genesis. From these circumstances the modern conclusion is that the narrative of the miraculous birth cannot have originated on Jewish-Christian soil, but upon pagan-Christian soil. On the other hand, the narrative in Luke is plainly a translation from the Hebrew. Accordingly it is inferred that the verses in Luke which speak plainly of the miraculous birth are a pagan-Christian interpolation into a Jewish-Christian source. But without warrant. The account in Luke of the annunciation is consistent with itself. The very verses which it is proposed to reject on account of their lack of harmony and to declare pagan-Christian, i. 34 ff., make perfectly good connection when translated back into Hebrew.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the narrative in Matthew, at least in its essence, is Jewish-Christian: it contains a Jewish pun (i. 21). And so we see that here a characteristically pagan conception present in Jewish-Christianity is transferred to Jesus. This is a point of great and fundamental importance. The conceptions that tended to paganism and mythology were not limited to later pagan-Christian-

---

<sup>1</sup> The angel announces to Mary (*καὶ ἰδὸν συλλήμψῃ* = הִנֵּךְ הַלָּה = "thou art on the point of conceiving") her immediate impending pregnancy, and she replies: "How is that possible, since I have known no man?" (*ὅτι γινώσκω* = לֹא יָדַעְתִּי = "I have until now known no man"). This removes the real objection to the unity of the story. The whole story, as its style and content clearly show, is Jewish-Christian.

ity, but they were already in existence in Jewish-Christianity. But this would have been impossible if Judaism had not already possessed these conceptions. We must assume that the birth of the Christ from a virgin and through the divine spirit belonged to the christological dogma even before the time of Jesus, just as did his origin in Bethlehem and from the family of David, and was attached to Jesus afterwards. What we have to learn, then, and what is to be shown over and over in the following pages, is that the Judaism which developed into Primitive Christianity must have been already strongly tinged with syncretism.

This transference of alien features to Jesus is to be recognised with especial clearness in the account of Matthew. For his account of the pursuit of Jesus by Herod and the latter's miraculous rescue we have an abundance of parallel versions. The same story is told everywhere in the Orient and the Occident, in ancient and modern and in the most recent times, about gods and heroes: of Zeus, Apollo, Horus, Cyrus, Romulus and Remus, etc.; and fundamentally it is the same story as that of the birth of the child in the Apocalypse of John, chapter 12. It is always the old king who pursues the new ruler that is to be born according to an oracle; while contrary to expectation the child is saved by a miracle and the oracle is finally fulfilled. Hundreds of generations have taken pleasure in this story. They have told this story about their most revered divinities and their most brilliant kings, and the Jews told it about their Christ. Jesus made such a mighty impression upon his generation, that the primitive legend was transferred to him: he must be born of God Himself, even as the prophecy regarding the Christ said.

In passing we may mention a few lesser traces of the mythical element in the Gospels. In the account of the baptism of Jesus the appearance of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove arouses interest and hesitation. Thus far this feature has stood without explanation. Here, too, some mythical element may have entered into the story. There are Oriental images of the gods with a dove upon the head of the figures.

The story of the temptation, also, is very extraordinary. The

appearance and action of the Devil in it is of mythical character; likewise the high mountain from which are to be seen all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. It is possible that the subject was originally a struggle between gods for dominion over the world. But here the struggle is carried on, not with weapons, but with sacred words: each of the combatants contends with passages from the Scripture.

Through the story of the transfiguration also we catch glimpses of mythical elements; there appear three transfigured celestial beings. And the phrase: "Let us build tabernacles here," which yields no sense in the present connection, must sometime have had some sort of sense.

Again in the miraculous increase of the loaves in the feeding of the multitude we are inclined to suspect a mythical character, in the miraculous transformation of the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, in the walking upon the sea, etc. At any rate, we should be more ready, in dealing with the stories of the Gospels, to face the possibility that there are mythical features involved.

#### MYTHS REGARDING THE RESURRECTED JESUS.

The mythical element enters more largely into the accounts of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. The story of the disciples at Emmaus is strikingly antique in style: Christ appears as a traveller unrecognised and reveals his mysterious and divine nature only through certain characteristics; but as soon as he is recognised, he disappears. This sketch of the story is perfectly analogous to the oldest narratives of the appearance of a divinity: the story might be taken from Genesis so far as its style goes.

It is perfectly obvious, and probably generally recognised, that the idea of the resurrection is mythical; it is thus that pagans speak of the apotheosis of the hero, or they tell how the young god, after having defeated his enemies and won dominion over the whole world, is acknowledged as supreme God in the hosts of Heaven! Even in the Psalms there are such descriptions of Yahveh, as he ascends into the heavenly heights accompanied by

shouts of jubilee and takes possession of the supreme throne of the world.

We have already observed such a scene of the enthronement of a supreme god in chapter v. of the Apocalypse of John. Similar notions are met here and there not infrequently in the New Testament Epistles: God has placed Jesus at his right hand in the celestial world, high above all dominion and might and power (Ephesians i. 21); he appeared to the angels and is received in glory (1 Timothy iii. 16); he has received a name that is above all names, so that at his name all knees shall bow, of those that are in Heaven, on the earth, and under the earth (Phil. ii. 9 ff.); he has gone, moreover, to the right hand of God in the Heavens, where angels and principalities and powers were made subject to him (1 Peter iii. 22).

It is clear that the idea of such enthronement is in its nature mythical. In the last analysis there is at the bottom of it the myth of the sun-god, who, rising from the depths, forces his way to Heaven and founds there his new and celestial kingdom. In Judaism too we read once of such an ascension of the Christ out of the depths of the sea (4 Ezra xiii.).

The idea of the descent into Hell, also, is mythical; it is hinted at in several places in the New Testament (Eph. iv. 8-10; Matt. xxvii. 52 ff.; 1 Peter iii. 20). The Apocalypse of John i. 18 is also illumined by the light from this notion: Christ appearing comforts the Seer saying, "I was dead and am alive, and have the keys of death and of Hades." We can make these words much clearer on the basis of especial Mandæan conceptions. The realms of death and of Hades, underneath the earth, are comparable to cities, the gates of which are locked with keys. The divine Saviour descends into Hell; he succeeds in getting possession of the keys and thereby obtaining control over it. He can now close up the subterranean realms at his pleasure. By means of such images the Apocalyptic writer makes it clear to himself that Jesus through his death and resurrection has won the control over death.

## THE ORIGIN OF SUNDAY.

We come now to another problem, which in its turn can be solved only by recourse to the practices of a foreign religion: the origin of Sunday as a festival of the Christian Church. The custom of celebrating Sunday, the first day of the week, or, as it is also called, the eighth day of the week, as the day of the Lord by assemblies, is a feature of the earliest stage of the Christian Church. We have positive though slender evidence of this even from the earliest times (Acts xx. 7; Apocalypse i. 10). It even seems to have been a custom in Corinth, according to Paul (1 Cor. xvi. 2). It is very difficult to explain the origin of this custom on the basis of primitive Christian conceptions. The establishment of a new festival day is far removed from the lofty and free spirit of the Gospel. It has been said that the Church celebrated in this way the day of the resurrection; it is certainly true that the celebration of this day was justified on this ground in very early times (Epistle of Barnabas xv.,—one of the Apocryphal books of the New Testament), and the declaration that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday is found even in our Gospels. But how did it happen that they began to celebrate the day of the resurrection every week? How are we to explain the fact that they called this day “the day of the Lord” (ἡ κυριακὴ ἡμέρα)? What has Jesus of Nazareth to do with a set festival? And why did they place the resurrection as having occurred on Sunday? For surely no one witnessed the resurrection!

All these difficulties are cleared up as soon as we go at the subject from the standpoint of the history of religion. If we were to hear of such a celebration of Sunday in any other Oriental religion, and then asked the question, “Who is meant by this Lord?” after whom Sunday is called “the day of the Lord,” we should forthwith receive the answer: this Lord is a God. The notion that certain days belong to certain gods was at that time widespread in the Orient; and Sunday, as the name still indicates, had been the day of the sun-god from primitive times in the Orient.

When the primitive Christian Church celebrated Sunday, it was adopting indirectly the celebration of the festival of an ancient divinity. The historical picture that we are warranted in giving is something like this: There must have been in Judaism certain circles who were accustomed to celebrate Sunday; and the oldest Christian congregation must have been recruited from these circles. But the Christian Church must have identified the "Lord" in whose honor the day was celebrated with their Jesus. A trace of this observance of Sunday even in Judaism is found in the Slavic Book of Enoch (xxxiii. 1), in which the eighth day is praised as superior to the Sabbath: "The seventh day," so the passage reads, "I blessed because it is the Sabbath on which I rested from all my works, but I established the eighth day in order that the eighth day should be the one first created over all my works." As foundation for the esteem in which the eighth day was held, a system of chronology is cited according to which the days of the week correspond to the entire age of the world, and the eighth day to eternity, the day of Judgment.

It is furthermore expressly recorded, Romans xiv., that the observance of other days made its way into the oldest Christian Church, or threatened to do so. And likewise we know that the celebration of Christmas, for instance, made its way into the Christian Church in a later period from syncretic circles. In the case of the Essenes we have an older example of the influence of pagan observance of periods of the day, especially of the phases of the sun. The adoption of Sunday by the primitive Christians is, as it seems to me, an exceedingly important symptom of the fact that the first Church was incidentally influenced by a spirit which was derived neither from the Gospels nor from the Old Testament, but from syncretism.

#### RESURRECTION ON THE THIRD DAY.

The fixing of the date of the resurrection is connected with the observance of Sunday. We are told that Jesus rose from the dead on Easter Sunday early in the morning at sunrise. But it would seem as though even one who is not accustomed to bother himself

with the history of religion would hesitate at this, and be disposed to ask: Was it chance that the claim is made that Jesus rose from the dead on this particular day of the calendar, on this especially holy Sunday, with which the sun arises from the night of winter? Are we not warranted in assuming that the idea of the resurrection of the dead god had long before fixed upon this day?

We go still further in this direction when we observe that the number "after three days," or, as a variant, "on the third day," recurs constantly in the accounts of the New Testament. The importance which the budding Christian Church attached to this number is shown by its constant recurrence. Even Paul in the famous fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians says that Christ "rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians xv. 4), and the number recurs in the Apostle's Creed. How did it happen that such importance was attributed to this number? The age of the New Testament gives us the key to the answer: because it had been prophesied (1 Corinthians xv. 4; Luke xxiv. 48). But it is well known that this prophecy is not found in the Old Testament, but that it was read into the text afterwards. No such prophecy of Jesus's resurrection after three days was found in Scripture until the number of three days had been set for Jesus's resurrection by another source. But whence did the authority for this number come and why was such stress laid upon it?

And now consider the fact that the number appears in two variant forms: "after three days," and "on the third day." The form "on the third day" fits the chronology of the Gospel account, according to which Jesus dies on the day before the Sabbath and rose from the grave on the day after the Sabbath. But whence comes the form "after three days," which really cannot be harmonised with the other reckoning? There is scarcely any other answer possible than this: The resurrection after three days is a doctrine which was adopted by the first Christian Church and can be explained only as the influence of some alien religion. Now the number "three days" is well known to us from other legends. Jonah remains three days in the whale's belly: this feature of the account of Jonah, for which we have many other parallels, goes

back originally to a myth of the sun-god who was swallowed up by the monster of the sea for "three times long." In Daniel "three and a half times" is the period for which Evil shall have power on earth; this number occurs again in Daniel vii. in what is originally a mythological connection: the course of world-year is being described,—the entire time of the world embraces four world-periods, which are in Daniel the four kingdoms of the world, represented by the four great mythological beasts, each of which dominates one of the periods; the fourth of the terrible beasts rules in the last world season, the winter of the world, for three and a half times, which is therefore the length of the world winter. In the Apocalypse of John, chapter xii., the young celestial hero, the sun-god, requires after his birth three and a half times to grow until his victory over the dragon, and during this period the saints on earth are persecuted. In the Mandæan literature the divine hero Hibilziwa is called the child of three months and a day; Apollo storms Parnassus on the fourth day after his birth; after three and a half days the two witnesses in Revelation xi., whom the dragon has slain, rise from the grave and ascend to Heaven. In all these cases we are dealing with modified legends: three, or more exactly, three and a half, is the period during which Evil has power, the period of sin and death, in which the God is growing and in concealment, while it seems to be consumed by Evil, until finally it rises from death and overcomes Evil. In many of these cases it is obvious that the number is derived from the life of the sun-god; it is the time during which winter prevails.

From this foundation, then, we have an explanation of the strange number of three days for the resurrection of Jesus; and this explanation is: Before the time of Jesus there existed already in syncretic Jewish circles a belief in the death and resurrection of the Christ. In the religions of the Orient it is nothing remarkable for the gods to die and be resurrected; we have such a belief authenticated in Egypt, Babylonia, Syria, Phœnicia. In Crete they even showed the grave of Zeus,—of course his empty grave. And that such a belief should be transferred to the Christ among the Jews is not by any means so improbable as would appear at



the first glance: 4 Ezra (vii. 29) speaks, although but cursorily, of the death of the Christ. And even in the Old Testament there is a mysterious chapter, which has hitherto defied all attempts at interpretation, which speaks of a personage who is greater than Moses or Joshua, who is called to lead the people back and to group them anew, even to stretch the heavens anew and prepare a new foundation for the earth: this personage has already appeared but remained unrecognised; he died a shameful death, but will be resurrected unto the glory which is prepared for him.

And in this chapter also, in the last analysis, there is no other explanation but that we have in the background the figure of a god who dies and is resurrected, which Judaism adapted to its own use after its own fashion. It is indeed no accident that the Church of Jesus referred to this particular prophecy: at bottom the two—prophecy and fulfilment—are identical, and we have a case of that phenomenon which we have so often observed, that the same material, variously adapted, appears in several different forms in history. It is known that this belief in a Christ who should die and be resurrected did not exist in official Judaism at the time of Jesus. But this does not interfere with the assumption that the belief existed in certain private circles, and in corners.

If what we have just suggested is well founded, we have thrown a certain light upon the origin of the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. It would not occur to the writer to try to "account for" the origin of this belief; he does not ignore the truth that other factors are to be considered in connection with this belief. But nevertheless it is significant that certain already existent conceptions coöperated with the disciples of Jesus after the death of their lord.

#### THE PAULINE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM.

The presumption that I have here expressed will be regarded as very radical. But perhaps this opinion will be altered by consideration of the apostle Paul's doctrine of baptism. In baptism, such is Paul's teaching, the believer is united with Christ; baptism is a symbol of death and burial; he who is baptised in Christ ex-

periences in baptism the death of Christ; thus he comes forth out of baptism as one who has died and been recalled to new life,—with his new garments he has put on Christ. Thus by the power of the cross that which happened to Christ on the cross is experienced by each individual in baptism.

Such a doctrine must seem incomprehensible to one who comes fresh from the study of the New Testament, and especially so if he knows the teachings of Jesus as presented in the synoptic Gospels. He must regard with boundless surprise the mystical union with Christ, the interpretation of baptism as drowning, the belief that eternal life is to be attained by such a sacrament, and the belief that what once took place with the celestial personage is repeated for the individual in the sacrament, for all of this finds no analogy in the Old Testament. And this interpretation did not arise organically from the practice of baptism itself, but was injected into it afterwards: baptism is inherently a washing, a purification, but not a slaying. Holtzmann says justly<sup>1</sup> that in the entire body of Pauline thought no element is so far removed from the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus which is so firmly planted in the soil of Israel, and so alien to it, as this doctrine of baptism. Comparisons have been suggested with customs in the Greek mysteries, and these are in fact similar.<sup>2</sup> But here too the Orient has been left out of account. In the Orient such ceremonies had existed for thousands of years, especially in Egypt. The mysteries of Osiris call for especial consideration.<sup>3</sup> Osiris too was slain, but came back to life; the victory of his son Horus had given him new life and dominion over the West. Hope and expectation are connected with this god who has made his way through death to life. There are definite formulæ and magic rites by means of which believers hoped to attain to eternal life as did Osiris. "In the mystical union with the divinity they found a reason for hope";<sup>4</sup> as the god passes across the celestial ocean to the beautiful West, so the deceased goes across the beautiful western sea to the realms of rest, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Holtzmann, II., p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> Holtzmann, II., p. 178 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Meyer, I., pp. 98 f., 76, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Tiele, *Gesch. der Religion*, I., p. 44.

here he may hope to live with the ransomed in the retinue of the gods, to behold and share in their glory. Later they said that the deceased would rise again from the dead as sun-god, and after overcoming the dangers of the realm of the dead would come to light again with the victorious god Ra.<sup>1</sup> The fate of the dead, it is expressly declared, is but a reflection of the fate of the god; by virtue of the conjurations the man becomes Osiris himself. These doctrines belong to the oldest Egyptian period and were afterwards transferred to other gods.

These parallels borrowed from the history of religions are indeed striking, notwithstanding the deviations in detail, which we have no intention to conceal. Here too is the belief that one can attain to eternal life through death, by the mystical union with the god who himself has died and been resurrected. Is this coincidence fortuitous? Or shall we not rather assume that the mysteries of the god who had died and yet was alive were at that time widely known in the Orient, and that they reached Paul through the medium of Judaism? Humanity at that period was full of the longing for immortality, full of the attempt to attain symbols that would give assurance of immortal life: through Paul this spirit entered into Christianity, and in the interest of this belief Paul transmuted the originally entirely alien custom.

But the great difference between the old Egyptian doctrine and that of the New Testament is, that in the former the entire concern is to give immortality to man, while in other respects he remains unchanged; his earthly appetites and enjoyments do not cease to exist in eternity, but persist, as in the heaven of Mohammed. In the New Testament, on the other hand, we read of the attaining to a new life, which is indeed a new one in every respect as opposed to this fleshly life. And so there is no need of concern that this religio-historical explanation of its origin will detract from the value of New Testament religion; on the contrary, it will bring that value out into the strongest light. This ought to be demonstrated right here in at least one point.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tiele, I., p. 44.

## RELATION OF OLD TESTAMENT TO NEW.

All the details which have here been presented are valuable only in proportion as they rest upon a certain fundamental view. And this view I propose to sketch in closing.

The Old Testament scholar who takes up the New Testament through the Synoptic Gospels enters a world there in which he feels entirely at home; there breathes a spirit which he understands well, which he knows to have come from the noblest of the prophets; and with joy he greets here the most glorious transfiguration of all that the prophets and psalmists wished for in their loftiest moments. In the words of Jesus there is relatively little that seems unfamiliar, and this little is only what must at that time have been generally accepted in Judaism; the alien features of the New Testament are centered in the eschatology and especially in the doctrine of the resurrection.

But it is a very different picture that is presented by the rest of the New Testament, especially by Paul and John. Here the Old Testament scholar meets at every step things for which he can find absolutely no analogy in his own field, and which he cannot understand historically. Recall simply such thoughts as the second birth, the son of God in the metaphysical sense, atonement through the death of Christ, mystical union of Christ with the Church, the creation of the world by Christ, and others; and although sometimes the same words occur in the New Testament yet they have here a sense entirely foreign to the Old Testament: *רָעָה*, for instance, so far as it has an ethical significance, means human nature from the side of its frailties; but with Paul *σάρξ* means the evil principle in man with a positive anti-divine energy.

No greater error could be committed than to assume that all the speculative notions of the New Testament must be explained on the basis of the Old Testament alone. The differences between the Old and the New Testaments involve first of all the language. Paul manifests a use of language which is very complex and developed into exceptional precision, and which can be comprehended

only in part on the basis of the Old Testament and the Gospels. And this use of language is but the reflection of more important things that are taking place beneath the surface. In the speculative thought of the New Testament we are dealing with great, fundamental religious conceptions and sentiments which are wholly or largely without analogy in the Old Testament. Consider for instance the longing of the human soul to escape from sin and the world, to be delivered from the body of this death, to behold the ideal in the image of one who is more than man, to make sure of God himself, to whom no one has access and whom no eye has seen, in the form of a representative whom one can more confidently approach, to be sure of atonement through the vicarious death of a supernatural being, to enter with one's whole soul into this being, and to experience in the sacrament the powers of the supernal world. Read, in order to realise the gap that lies between, one of the prophets or a few of the Psalms, and then the Epistle to the Romans. How did this new spirit enter into primitive Christianity? Not through Jesus, in whose discourses the notions of salvation, atonement, justification, second birth, and reception of the spirit are not found.<sup>1</sup> In the teachings of Jesus everything centers about an ethical imperative born of supreme religious individualism; in Paul the center of all is the belief in a system of saving facts which occurred at the same time in Heaven and on earth.<sup>2</sup> Nor did all this come new into existence from the experiences of the disciples in connection with the historical figure of Jesus. If this had been the case, we should expect to find these doctrines especially in the circle of the first disciples. But now it is generally recognised that these doctrines did not come in until the second and third generations. And in any case, even the experiences derived from contact with Jesus presuppose somehow a predisposition and a longing for these experiences. One who had been reared in the atmosphere of the Old Testament, and in that alone, would not have had this same experience with Jesus.

Now anyone who considers collectively all these doctrines

---

<sup>1</sup> Wernle, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Wrede, p. 67.

which are foreign to the Gospel cannot fail to marvel at the enormous spiritual activity of primitive Christianity, and will be inclined to assume that there must have been at work here an extraordinarily large outside factor. It is not the Gospel of Jesus, but the primitive Christianity of Paul and John, which may be called a syncretic religion.

Now where are we to look for this outside factor? At present it is the custom to seek it almost exclusively in the influence of neo-Hellenism, particularly in that of Alexandria. Let me again declare that this factor, which it is not my purpose here to discuss, is not to be ignored or underrated. But the question is, whether this entirely explains the problem. The variety of details which have been collected in the preceding pages forces us to ask whether the outside factor is not to be sought in the Orient. And in this field we are perfectly justified in turning first of all to the effect of Oriental Gnosticism. The connection of Paul and John with later Occidental Gnosticism has long been acknowledged. And now recall the sketch of Oriental Gnosticism which has been presented in the preceding pages. In fact, primitive Christianity agrees with this Oriental Gnosticism in many points wherein it differs from the Gospels: we need mention here only the high value placed upon *γνῶσις* (*Erkenntnis*, knowledge), the division of the world which occasionally suggests dualism, the longing of man for salvation, the belief in the descent of a divine saviour, the belief in the sacraments, the treatment of gnosis as a sort of mystery, which plays a large part in the New Testament also (the Gospel of John is keyed throughout to this tone of infinitely deep mysterious doctrines which common men hear not though having ears that hear), etc.

Indeed there are common elements even in the style itself, such as "the life," "the light," the "word of life," the "vine," all as names of æons. All this should be enough to lead the New Testament student to seek for clues, not only in Hellenism, but also in the Orient; it would be an especially valuable service if some one would determine just how much of the linguistic character is actually derived from the Old Testament.

## THE CHRISTOLOGY OF PAUL.

Let us now select from this whole body of material two points which may be regarded as the central features of the New Testament. First of these, the belief in the resurrection. With regard to this belief we have already shown in the preceding pages that it goes back through Judaism to the Orient. The second great point is the Christology. The origin of the Pauline and Johannine Christology is the problem of all problems in the New Testament. Modern exegetics, if the writer is rightly informed, agree in the opinion that this Christology is a new creation due to Paul. A great number of factors have been cited, which are said to have contributed to the development of the Pauline Christology: the all-dominating personality of Jesus, the vision of Paul who saw Jesus transfigured as a heavenly vision, and furthermore Jewish-Hellenistic doctrines of the celestial archetype of humanity, and quite recently Lueken calls attention to many parallels between the figure of Christ and the archangel Michael.<sup>1</sup> All this may have contributed its influence, but all these together are not the decisive factor. First of all, for instance, the impression made by the historical Jesus: beyond question it is of immeasurable importance, but it can scarcely be maintained that this can have produced the conception of Christ proclaimed by Paul; indeed, "the humanly individual personality of Jesus has almost vanished in the portrayal of the apostle" (Wrede, p. 68); "Paul is absolutely not intelligible on the basis of the teachings of Jesus alone" (Wrede, p. 67). Knowing only the Christology of Paul, who would be able to derive from it the picture of the historical Jesus? And on the other hand, who that had made the acquaintance of the historical Jesus would ever conclude that such Christology as that of Paul would be the result? Think, for instance, of Paul's utterances regarding the cosmic significance of Christ; is the opinion that the world was created by Christ derived from the impression made by the person of Jesus?

Without doubt the doctrine of the archetypal man, which is

---

<sup>1</sup> Lueken, *Michael*.

perhaps of Jewish-Hellenic origin, played a part in this connection; but how can we explain the immense enthusiasm with which Paul proclaims Christ the son of God? Certainly not from speculation and philosophy, but from a religious sentiment which pervaded him wholly. The figure of Michael furnishes many parallels, but this comparison is lame at the most important point: Michael is a servant of God, Christ is the son; moreover, the figure of Michael rouses no such enthusiasm in Judaism. And in the face of all these conjectures there is this to be said: Is it in any way possible to think that Paul himself created this figure of Christ in its essential features? Paul lives for this Christ: "Christ is my life;" he receives everything from him: justification, salvation, sanctification, new life; he is ready to give up everything for him. This Christ is not to him a creature of his imagination, but a reality. This Christ cannot be merely an immense projection of his own subjective experiences. As Holtzmann has said, the pre-existence of Christ cannot be accounted for as a "theory by rhetorical manipulation"; this image of Christ must needs have been given to him or at least have been prepared for him in some way, if he could feel willing to sacrifice his whole life to this Christ.

Hence we think that any one who undertakes to explain Paul's conception of Christ must at the same time explain particularly the religion of Paul with which this conception is connected and in the midst of which it stands. All great religious experiences are examined by Paul and tested in the light of the person of Christ, of his cross and of his resurrection: what took place in these connections was not simply an individual experience which may be of importance, as is common among men, in the way of imitation by other men, but these were a series of facts which had a fundamental and immediate importance for God and the world. In the name of Christ great and world-ruling powers are vanquished, the whole world of this carnal life is slain by his death, and a new world rises in his resurrection. This is really the kernel of the faith of Paul: that what was accomplished through Christ was achieved not for him but for the whole human race. These are great religious thoughts which are wholly without parallels in the



history of the Old Testament and of Judaism so far as they are in our ken, and for which we cannot find in that history even the means of transmission.

But it becomes clear to us from whence this religion comes when we consider the character of the figures which it introduces. Here we find Christ a celestial personage, the foremost of all beings next to God, the image of the Invisible whom he reveals, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead, the firstborn of all creation, in whom all things are created and have their being. And what does he tell us of this heavenly personage? That he humbled himself and took on human form here below; that he died a shameful death but experienced a glorious resurrection and was raised up above all creatures. The powers that rule the earth, thus we read in one place, did not recognise him, else they would not have brought him to the cross. And in another place, that he stripped powers and principalities and made of them a public mockery. Soon he will return and destroy the man of sin by the breath of his mouth; he will vanquish all powers and principalities until he shall surrender the rule into the hands of God.

We cannot help asking, What sort of utterances are these? Where shall we find their like? It is the merit of Wernle to have announced the clue to all this, repeating it over and over again in his book without indeed being aware that it is the clue; it is the word "mythology." Where else is there an instance of other divine beings by the side of the supreme god, of the supreme god remaining inert while another being, similar to him but subordinate to him, officiates in his stead, of this god appearing on earth, dying, being resurrected, ascending up to Heaven and there being glorified? All this is commonplace in other religions. But in particular the mythological character is seen in the manner of judging the actions of Christ. For this is precisely the characteristic feature of the stories of gods, that along with the divine personages are understood and involved principles: thus in the dragon myth that we have treated, the kingdom of light is regarded as the sun-hero, while darkness and water are personified in the dragon. Everything that the divine personages do has some direct and fun-

damental significance. Christ in his resurrection brings life to light, and we share this with him if we attain to the mystical union with him, so that Wernle is right when he says: What Paul utters in regard to Jesus is at bottom a myth, a drama for which the name of Jesus furnished the title.

And is this any occasion for surprise? Recall the many remnants of myths which we have already found in the Christology of the New Testament. How many different personages had been identified with Jesus: the magician god of the fifth chapter of the Apocalypse of John, the rescued sun-youth and dragon-vanquisher of chapter 12, the supernaturally begotten hero of the story of the infancy of Jesus, and he who went down into Hell and arose to Heaven! All this was transferred to Jesus, because it had been attached to the Christ before, and this, we maintain, is the secret of the whole subject of New Testament Christology. The outline of the celestial Christ must have been in existence somehow already. Now we know from some fragments in the Jewish Apocalyptic writers that such beliefs existed in certain Jewish circles. We have seen that some centuries earlier a similar belief had reached the prophets and had by them been most vigorously assimilated to the belief of Israel. Although born in paganism, this figure of the celestial Christ had now so captivated the hearts of men in Judaism that they could no longer free themselves from it. Their hearts already believed in a divine revelator, a union of the human and the divine in action, and a confirmation through sacraments. In precisely what forms this belief existed, we cannot at present say; there is a great gap in our knowledge at this point! Later Judaism in its opposition to Christianity obliterated the most of the similarities. In 4 Ezra (vi. 1 ff.) we have a trace of such polemics: we read there that the end of the world is to come about through no one but the creator himself.

But although we know practically nothing of this form of belief in the Christ among the Jews, yet we must presume it for any proper understanding of the New Testament. When Jesus appeared in his superhuman dignity, when he won all hearts to himself, and his disciples believed that he was the Christ, his enthusi-

astic followers had attributed to him the greatest honor known to Judaism.

Now this Christology was not developed to explain the mystery of his personality (as though Jesus were the essential or primary element and the Christology secondary), but rather the souls that were longing for the presence of God, who felt the need of a son of God who should descend from Heaven, transferred to Jesus all the ideals of their hearts. Thus New Testament Christology is, as it were, a mighty hymn sung by history to the praise of Jesus. And the charm which is exercised by this notion of the son of God who descends to earth is to be read in the entire history of Christianity unto the present day.

It is evident that this figure of the celestial Christ is not in the last analysis to be reconciled with monotheism; it was originally begotten amidst polytheistic environment,—this image of a second God who reveals the supreme God. This is the reason why genuine Judaism rejected this conception of Christ. The scholars of the Christian Church have labored for centuries to harmonise these irreconcilable factors.

We have reached our conclusion. Christianity is a syncretic religion. Important religious elements that came from foreign sources are contained in it. These must have entered into the primitive Church immediately after the death of Jesus. The Christianity which was destined to be preached to many nations was itself not the product of one nation, but sprang from the complex history of many nations.

HERMANN GUNKEL.

UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN, GERMANY.